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Sustaining Little Paradise in Flamingo Heights: Expanding Early Childhood Development Opportunities in an Informal Settlement

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Sustaining “Little Paradise” in Flamingo Heights:

Expanding Early Childhood Development Opportunities in an Informal Settlement



An Interactive Qualifying Project submitted to the faculty of Worcester Polytechnic Institute in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor Science.

Abstract

The early years of a child’s life are incredibly important in their physical, cognitive, and social development. The push for quality early childhood development (ECD) opportunities in South Africa requires the involvement of several stakeholders to ensure proper implementation. The aim of this project was to assist in the challenging process of both formalizing and obtaining financial support to ensure the continued operations of Little Paradise Educare Centre in Flamingo Heights, Lansdowne. By working with the crèche’s governing body and the community, while connecting and collaborating with several non-profit organizations, such as our sponsor, the Centre for Early Childhood Development (CECD), we were able to aid in the lengthy government registration process, implement sustainable funding methods, and provide a model for effective administration of an ECD centre.

This is an executive summary of a WPI Cape Town Project Centre project that is fully reported at <http://wp.wpi.edu/capetown/projects/p2015/cecd/>

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THE OPPORTUNITY OF LITTLE PARADISE EDUCARE CENTRE

The idea of Little Paradise came to life in 2013, as the reblocking process of Flamingo Heights, an informal settlement outside of Cape Town South Africa, left a small but reasonably sized plot of land for the purpose of building a crèche, which is a school for children between the ages of 6 months and 5 years to go to school to be prepared for grade R in primary school. The building of Little Paradise was completed in December of 2014, with the assistance of the Centre for Childhood Development (CECD), Informal Settlement Network (ISN), Community Organisation Resource Centre (CORC), and Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI). In February of 2015, the crèche began operating with 26 pre-school age children enrolled. While parental fees provide some income to support crèche operations, the limited income of families living within the settlement undermine the sustainability of this financing approach. The crèche has been unable to pay the initial two teachers and cook. Although there are many children joyful at their opportunity for education, the struggle for operating Little Paradise sustainably is an ongoing



Figure 1: Little Paradise Logo

effort. Should the provincial government formally register the crèche, subsidies will become available to support day-to-day operations. However, the registration process is complex, time consuming, and slow. This project aimed to assist the governing body of Little Paradise Educare Centre to progress through the registration process.



Figure 2: Children enrolled in crèche playing with playdough

CHALLENGES FACING EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

Social, political, economic and environmental inequalities contribute to the many challenges faced by the early childhood development (ECD) sector in South Africa. Establishing and operating an ECD facility, particularly in under-resourced communities, is further challenged by interpersonal differences, funding support, infrastructure requirements, skills and capacity of crèche staff, community influences, and government regulations.

Interpersonal Differences

The operation of a crèche is heavily dependent on either those who own the crèche, or an elected governing body. Although there are many organizations that offer management assistance, lasting positive change is only possible with cooperation of the owner or governing body, crèche staff, and parents of children enrolled. Specifically, groups having “high levels of ethnic heterogeneity and residential instability are believed to undermine social networks and shared values, resulting in social disorganization” (Burchinal et al, 2008). Residential instability as well as ethnic diversity is common to many informal settlements in South Africa and contributes to differences in beliefs and willingness to support ECD efforts. Trust is a key factor in community support. The community and crèche have to develop trust and mutual respect for the benefit of the children.

Funding Support

Parent fees provide the majority of funding for ECD centres. However, due to limited income in informal settlements, this is not a reliable approach. The Department of Social Development (DSD) provides subsidies for registered centres, which gives the centre a set amount of funds per child per day. Based on a budget sheet from 2012/2013, it was estimated that the Western Cape spends around R384,764,000 per year on ECD. This falls in the middle of the range of the nine South Africa provinces (Atmore et al., 2012).

Infrastructure Requirements

Infrastructure is one of the leading challenges ECD centres face. Many centres



Figure 3: Inside of Little Paradise

function without the basic amenities of electricity, running water, or means of sanitation. A nation-wide ECD audit in 2000 showed that 8% of ECD centres in South Africa do not meet the basic infrastructure requirements set by the Department of Education (Atmore, 2013). Lack of infrastructure presents significant safety risks, health code violations, and poor service quality. Informal settlements in need of ECD also then have the burden of paying for costs associated with building/renovations (Atmore et al., 2012).

Skills and Capacity of Crèche Staff

A study done in the Western Cape by ECD service researchers showed that only 47% of the practitioners responsible for older children (3-5 years) had any form of ECD qualifications (Atmore, 2013). The DSD has set minimum standards for ECD teachers and caretakers. Practitioners are now required to obtain training as ECD Level 4 educators and the Further Education and Training Certificate (DSD, 2015). This training provides basic skills to improve the quality of ECD services.

Community Influences

Promoting ECD outside of the centre is another struggle faced in informal settlements. A Family Outreach programme in the community of Gugulethu, implemented by the CECD in 2011, successfully shows how the intervention can have a positive impact on caregiver's role towards child development. This programme resulted in approximately 30% more caregivers reading to their children twice or more in a week and over 40% more feeding their children more than four times a day (CECD, 2014).



Figure 4: Meeting about issues facing Flamingo Heights

Social challenges can strongly affect community influences on ECD. Poverty in informal settlements correlates to the scarcity of food and resources that is less of an issue in communities with a higher average income. The complex state of poverty can be observed as a range of characteristics including chronic hunger, inadequate housing, and low living standards (Barbarin et al., 2013). The effects of poverty can be devastating to child development and can attribute to chronic malnutrition, illnesses, slow cognitive development, insufficient psychological functioning, academic failures, and future unemployment. Recognizing the val-

ue of proper nutrition in body and brain development during early childhood (Aber et al., 1997), crèches serve as an important source of food for children in under resourced communities in South Africa.

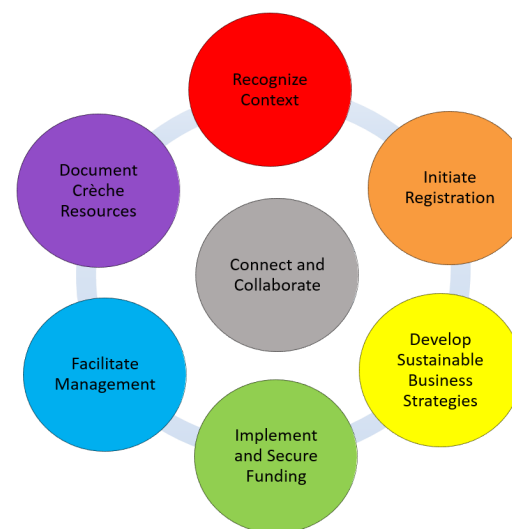
Children of impoverished areas are also more susceptible to violent maltreatment due to these social challenges (Aber et al., 1997). Integrating violence prevention into ECD programmes can promote positive disciplinary actions and create a realm of respect for children's rights by working with caregivers to provide support and cultivate healthy relationships (Phyfer and Wakefield, 2015). Integrating violence prevention into ECD can promote a healthier developmental lifestyle for children, and has the potential to decrease rates of crime and violence.

Government Registration and Regulations

When registering an ECD facility in South Africa, there are four necessary registration processes: Non-Profit Organisation, Partial Care Facility, Early Learning Programme, and Government Subsidy. Regulations surrounding registration poses many challenges for centres throughout informal settlements, one of the biggest being the cost to register. Many start-up centres operate in very low income areas that cannot afford these fees, and therefore fail to register. Other regulations are not feasible in certain informal settlements, such as safe and enclosed outdoor play areas. The requirements are two square metres per child. Many of these settlements are so dense with structures that this is not an option. For the sake of registering centres in informal settlements, there needs to be modification of the governmental regulations to ensure these centres have the chance to become formal ECD facilities.

MISSION

This project was intended to expand early childhood development opportunities in Flamingo Heights by engaging the community in substantial efforts to support the Little Paradise Educare Centre. With the help of our partners, we assisted with the formal registration process and the implementation of crèche business logistics. Our work with parents and community leaders helped in the realization of the crèche's full potential, and provided a viable and sustainable model for future management and growth of early childhood development centres in informal settlements throughout South Africa.



Drawing from the Participatory Development and Adaptation Process (PDAP) developed by the 2014 Flamingo Project Team, we designed our project objectives as a fluid process centred around connection and collaboration. PDAP was originally conceived to involve "all partners in an improvi-

sational design and construction process that sought to best utilize each partners' assets and expertise" (CTPC Flamingo, 2014). We adapted their process to cater to the next phase of maintaining an ECD Centre.

Connect and Collaborate: Form trusting relationships with partners to utilize the network of organizations and resources available for the advancement of Little Paradise crèche through clear communication.

Recognize Context: Recognize the different views people have about the crèche to understand the community members' perception of Little Paradise Educare Centre and the role it plays in Flamingo Heights.

Initiate the Registration Process: Advance Non-Profit Organisation Registration, Partial Care Facility Registration, Early Learning Programme Registration, and Subsidy Registration.

Develop Sustainable Business Strategies: Enhance business strategies such as budgeting, organization, and record keeping.

Implement and Secure Funding: Acquire funding opportunities available and best suitable for the area to secure funding for the crèche.

Facilitate Management: Facilitate an active governing body and crèche staff for effective crèche management.

Document Crèche Resources: Generate a sustainable model for ECD registration through the documentation of necessary steps, policies, and procedures created during the process.

OUTCOMES & ACCOMPLISHMENTS

To achieve our project objectives, in collaboration with our partners, we utilised the framework of the crèche registration processes as our guide. We assisted the Little Paradise governing body to continue to complete the formal registration and simultaneously enhanced their business skills. Drawing on the foundational aspects of 'Connecting and Collaborating' and 'Recognizing and Understanding' as outlined in our objectives, we took steps to strengthen relationships among governing body members, strengthen the members' organisational and business skills, and complete necessary steps in the registration process.

Connecting and Collaborating

Our team established trusting relationships with the governing body by getting to know them on a personal level through fun and meaningful activities, while also sharing the hard work of the registration process. A critical part of developing our project was utilizing the network of organisations and



Figure 5: WPI Team with Governing Body Members

resources available to the governing body, such as the CECD, Early Learning Resource Unit, and the South African Shack Dwellers International Alliance. Collaboration and constant communication with all involved was necessary to ensure everyone was on the same page and was important in guaranteeing all opportunities for improving the crèche were utilised. This was achieved through phone calls and texts, almost daily meetings, and emails.

Recognizing Context

Through interaction with community members, we were able to garner an understanding of the challenges Flamingo Heights, and similar communities, face including educational opportunities, employment, government support, illicit activities, poverty, and crime. Walking through the community and speaking with its residents alludes to struggles of personal pasts and hard times that many experience. According to Cathy, the principal of Little Paradise, the most substantial issue facing Flamingo Heights is the "street mind-set" of some of its residents. She mentioned that many of the community members in Flamingo Heights once lived on the streets. Despite now having a more formal home through the reblocking process, some do not care for the house. This mind-set carries through to influence all aspects of the community. The streets are often filled with rubbish that is not picked up, and while there is general support of the crèche, there is much work to be done. A number of parents do not pay their crèche fees, withdrawing their children from the centre at the time of the month when payments are due.

Playing with the children was also a particularly meaningful part of our project. Devel-

oping relationships with the kids at the crèche was fun, enlightening, and brought to life the work we were doing. Celebrating



Figure 6: WPI Students playing with children enrolled in crèche

the children, especially in visible ways, was an effective way to communicate with the community the value of the crèche and of early childhood development.

November 20th is Universal Children's Day recognized globally as a reminder of children's rights. Arranging an event for this day provided an opportunity to bring the Flamingo Heights community together to re-



Figure 7: Cathy, the principal, celebrating Universal Children's Day with children

member that the children are why so much hard work and dedication is needed from the community to give them the best opportunities. Organising the event motivated the governing body. This event also brought about a potential future fundraising event and grew Little Paradise's network of potential funders through invitations and thank you cards for donations.



Figure 8: WPI Students celebrating Universal Children's Day with children

On December 11th 2015, 10 children from Little Paradise Educare Centre graduated, ready to move onto primary school in January. There was a ceremony in the crèche for them to receive their certificates of achievement and get photographs taken with teachers and parents. This celebration brought parents together and gave them

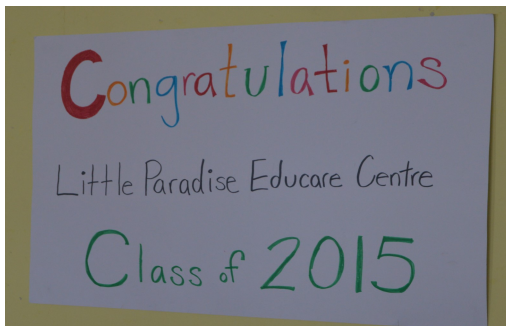


Figure 9: Banner for Graduation

pride for how well their children were doing. This event showed how far Flamingo Heights had come in the early childhood development aspect by having their first graduating class of Little Paradise. This will hopefully be the first of many graduating classes.



Figure 10: Graduating Class of 2015

Initiating the Registration Process

During our time working with the governing body of Little Paradise Educare Centre, we have completed NPO Registration.



Figure 11: Elizabeth submitting NPO Registration online

Partial Care Facility Registration was also started. To promote understanding and ensure completion of this process, we created a binder with the specific forms that need to be filled out and any additional steps necessary to continue with the registration. The CECD is available to help guide Little Paradise Educare Centre with the rest of registration as needed. The Early Learning Programme Registration has also been started with the help from Early Learning Resource Unit (ELRU).

Facilitating Sustainable Business Strategies

In order to enhance Little Paradise Educare Centre as an organisation, incorporating business strategies of the governing body such as budgeting, organization, and record keeping proved necessary. Establishing an email account and setting up a bank account were two big accomplishments. A year-long budget for Little Paradise was also

developed. This document was critical for the management of finances and the establishment of relationships with potential donors. Together, we created templates for the documentation of financial records, agreed upon regular meeting protocols for the governing body, and reconstructed the operating procedures of the governing body to make the members more involved and the body as a whole more engaged.



Figure 12: Cathy, Elizabeth, Merelda, and Lenrika at Standard Bank opening an account

Implementing and Securing Funding

In this present funding gap, from start-up to government subsidy, we searched for suitable funding opportunities. We worked with the governing body and drafted a financial proposal to WPI requesting funds for the crèche based on their budget. This same proposal can further be used when asking for donations from other organisations. The proposal to WPI resulted in a donation of R10,000 that will be distributed over the next 12 months as long as the governing body continues meeting monthly, keeping

track of expenses, and updating WPI on their registration process.



Figure 13: Merelda, Elizabeth, and Cathy submitting the proposal to WPI

Implementation of the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) was also established through collaboration between our sponsor and another ECD non-profit organisation, Foundation for Community Work (FCW). EPWP is a governmental programme in South Africa available to provide unemployed individuals with temporary employment and skills development. This programme provided an opportunity to bridge the gap from crèche start-up to government subsidy, in which the governing body was struggling to establish a sustainable income to support the staff. Implementing EPWP helped bring our project full circle by generating paying jobs, lessening tension related to lack of finances, and creating an opportunity to increase community involvement with ECD by incorporating both nutritional and community outreach positions.

Facilitating Management

An effective and successful governing body is directly related to the success of the crèche as they are the ones ensuring how the facility is run, handling business logistics and taking care of other behind-the-scenes aspects that generally go unnoticed. The governing body became an established organisation through creating a constitution and redefining their roles.



Figure 14: WPI students and Governing Body members holding signed constitution

Our team organized and moderated a workshop for the governing body to develop and implement these logistics. Team building was essential to creating a trusting relationship within the governing body and maximizing their effectiveness of working together. Activities like Leading the Blind and Let's Play Zoo encouraged collaboration in a fun and enjoyable way. Increasing transparency between the governing body and parents with open, scheduled meetings was also a major goal they set for themselves.

Documenting Crèche Resources

Through documentation of all of the items we created to further progress in the registration of the crèche, our team helped generate a sustainable model for ECD centre registration.

We edited and reconstructed ECD Information Pack, a guide for crèche development, initially developed by past WPI projects and through close collaboration with the CECD. This document guides crèches from start-up to formal registration/subsidy with a checklist of critical steps, business tactics, and example templates.

Conclusion

Formalising early childhood development centres proves to be difficult in informal settlements due to lack of resources. Given this challenge, active involvement of the community and several partners is essential to tackling the lengthy registration process, implementing funding, effectively administering, and ensuring sustainable ECD opportunities.



Figure 15: WPI Team and Governing Body members on the last day

Reflection

Flamingo Heights has come so far, from reblocking and upgrading the community to planning and constructing Little Paradise Educare Centre. It is a long hard process to build a crèche, but it is also difficult to maintain and keep the crèche running after it is built. There are countless and daunting objectives to tackle in operating an early childhood development centre. It's sometimes hard to see all that has been accomplished. Much of the past work done in Flamingo Heights resulted in physical changes, but our work has largely been in the form of documentation and organisational structuring.

However, we have seen so many changes in the way the community perceives the crèche, the enthusiasm of the governing body, and the general hope for the well-



Figure 16: Children in the crèche ready for lunch

being of the crèche. Little Paradise has truly grown into an amazing place for the children of Flamingo Heights to learn and develop in a safe and welcoming environment. Being a part of this journey was a life changing and fulfilling experience that we will never forget.



Mike, Elizabeth, Kim, Cathy, Merelda, John, Lenrika, and Maggie

Special Thanks to all who made this project possible

The Flamingo Heights Community – for welcoming a third WPI team into their community with kindness and making us feel at home.

Little Paradise Educare Centre Governing Body – Lenrika, Marky, Merelda, Elizabeth, and Melanie for your hard work and dedication to improving as a governing body and becoming an effective managing body.

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